

CHAPTER 7

THE CHURCH IN THE FIFTH CENTURY

The years following the fourth century see the end of the Roman, Mediterranean civilization, and the beginning of European civilization. When the Goths and Slavs enter the Balkans to sever the eastern empire from the west, and in the 600s when the Arabs move into North Africa and Palestine, a vestige of the Roman Empire will be preserved in the “Holy Roman Empire.”

Political situation to 460

378, battle of Adrianople; Ostragoths defeated Romans, killed emperor Valens, took Romania

392, empire united for last time under Theodosius

395, Theodosius died; empire permanently divided; western empire often plundered by barbarians; eastern empire more stable, lasted over a thousand years

410, Alaric, leader of Arian Visigoths, sacked Rome for three days; great looting, many people murdered (many soldiers out of control), churches and people in them spared

430, Vandals conquered and plundered through northern Europe, Spain, north Africa

450, Vandals sailed from north Africa to Italy

451-452, Attila led Huns through Europe from central Asia; worse than Goths and Vandals; came to take Rome, met by pope Leo, left Rome; 452, Attila died, Huns disintegrated; some north Italians fled to Adriatic islands, founded Venice

455, Vandals sacked and pillaged Rome terribly

533ff, Emperor Justinian makes a final attempt to reunite the broken Roman empire

events in Britain:

southern part Christianized already through Roman civilization

attacks on south Britain came from Picts (north) and Scots (Ireland), and from the continent by Angles, Saxons, and Jutes

by 409, Rome had ceased to aid Britain in its defense

very little communication from Britain for next 150 years, as Teutons defeated the native British and drove them into the mountains of Wales by 577; now called “Angle-land”

Conversion and mission work of Ireland

1. Situation at AD 400

wild tribes; little Christianity; much fighting

2. Palladius (early fifth century)

native of Gaul; delegate from church to Rome

431, selected by pope Celestine to be “the first bishop of the Scots who believe in Christ”
[shows that there were believers in Ireland before Patrick]

had desire to combat Pelagianism; went to Ireland, started three churches; opposed by chief and majority of pagans; left after one and a half years, no lasting impression; died in Britain on way back to Rome

3. Patrick (ca. 390-461)

only sources of information are his own short writings and medieval traditions (these confused, mixed with those of Palladius); Patrick’s writings show no connection with Rome; style is vulgarized British Latin, shows training in Britain, not Rome

born in Britain, Christian family; sixteen years old, captured by Irish marauders; for six years a slave herdsman in Ireland; converted during that time; escaped; made passage to Britain (or France); had vision in the night to return with gospel

432, returned to Ireland as missionary; about thirty years, wandered, preached, taught throughout Ireland

big influence; by 480, most Irish people nominally Christian; established churches independent from Rome; he and St. Bridgit established monasteries

4. Irish missionary work

during next six centuries, Ireland sent missionaries and evangelized Scotland, France, Switzerland, even northern Italy

5. Attachment to Rome

independent of Rome until twelfth century

ca. 1155, pope Adrian IV gave permission and commission to Henry II of England to subdue Ireland by arms, to bring it into the Roman fold

1171, Henry II conquered Ireland, bloody battles; Irish hate English ever since; Irish church Romanized; Easter date, other customs made same as those of Rome

later, when England became Protestant, Ireland opposed it by staying stronger than ever Roman Catholic

The church of Rome in the fifth century

1. Factors contributing to its growing international importance

a. City of Rome

city important in the Roman empire, largest city in West

b. Lack of competing churches

no equally prestigious churches in West (cf. in East: Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria, etc.)

c. Apostolic foundation

only western church claiming apostolic foundation (v. Tertullian); Peter and Paul—strong tradition in early church and throughout middle ages (not mentioned in Acts)

d. Most important citizen

with the emperor moving to the East, pope left as the most important citizen in the West; respected by barbarians (Alaric spared churches; Attila ward off by Leo)

e. Reference point

western churches more frequently turned to Roman church for aid and advice

2. Relationship of the Roman bishops to the north African church

during times of Innocent and Zosimus, north African church sought aid of popes, but was willing to oppose them (as in Pelagian issue)

when some deposed north African bishops sought aid of pope, north African synod denied the authority of the Roman bishop over them; this position maintained during Augustine's lifetime

after Vandal conquest of north Africa in 430, small persecuted Catholic churches sought aid from pope, became subservient to Roman church

3. Popes comparatively insignificant until 440

4. Leo I, the Great (pope 440-461)

two popes with "Great" title: Leo I and Gregory I (pope 590-604)

assisted pope Celestine I (422-432); tradition that he was sent to north Africa to visit Augustine

elected pope in 440 and declared St. Peter and St. Paul to be the new patron replacements for Romulus and Remus; ruled for 21 years; excellent administrator, combined Roman law with church law; evangelical and orthodox

convinced Attila not to take Rome in 452; in 455, persuaded Vandals to refrain from murdering

populace of Rome

Pushed for pre-eminence of the Roman bishop over other bishops (“one holy, catholic, apostolic church” of the Nicene Creed); brought Gallic Church under Rome

theological clarity of mind and expression; opposed heresies; e.g., council of Chalcedon in 451 adopted a statement nearly copying his letter to Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople

very strong for pope’s authority, as successor of Peter; no salvation outside the Catholic church

Christological controversies of the fifth century

Most of these controversies about the deity/humanity of Christ centered in the eastern church. The council of Nicea had condemned Arianism and the council of Constantinople in 381 had already condemned Apollinarianism.

By the end of the IV century, the full humanity and fully deity of Christ was recognized; new controversies arose in the V century regarding how His natures from heaven and earth combined.

1. Nestorianism: (=two persons in one person of Christ)

Nestorius (first half of the fifth century), trained in Antioch; teachers stressed Christ’s full humanity (against Apollinarianism)

Nestorius somewhat ignorant, attacked people wildly, seemed to many to support two persons of Christ

became patriarch of Constantinople in 428; received Pelagius; sermon to emperor: “force out heresies”;
opposed *theotokos* title for Mary (“*mother of God*” cf. Luke 1:35,43); said Mary the mother only of Jesus’ humanity, thus divided Jesus effectively into two persons (term as now used by Roman Catholic not appropriate, as it is associated with worship of Mary)

Cyril of Alexandria was against Nestorius, as was the bishop of Rome, who sent delegates against him

2. Council of Ephesus, 431 AD

= third ecumenical council

called by emperor Theodosius II and western emperor Valentinian III; attended by 160 bishops, including three papal representatives

actions of council:

*condemned Nestorianism and deposed Nestorius (exiled)

The eastern church’s favorite verse to describe the mystery of the union of Christ’s earthly and heavenly natures was 2 Peter 1:3,4 “as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers

of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

*affirmed Christ as one person, Mary as *theotokos*

*condemned Pelagianism (mainly because of its association with Nestorius)

Nestorians moved to Persia and China, received well there; developed large churches; still continue in small groups today

widespread missionary work to Arabia, India, China; these churches largely destroyed by Moslems by the twelfth century

3. Eutychianism (Monophysitism)

Eutyches head of monastery in Constantinople; opposed Nestorius, went to other extreme → Christ has only one nature, one soul (*mono-psuche*, “one soul, nature”) a prime danger of this position was that the divine nature and will would overshadow the human will of the one, composite nature

Flavian, new archbishop of Constantinople, took balanced view; Eutyches opposed Flavian, had influence with emperor Theodosius II; from Rome pope Leo wrote a good letter supporting Flavian

Emperor Theodosius II called a council in Ephesus in 449 (Leo later called it the “Robber Council”):

135 bishops; weighted for Eutyches

incredibly violent and vicious (cf. Schaff, *History* 3:738-740)

condemned Flavian; deposed Leo; Egyptian attendants of the presiding officer seized Flavian and beat him so severely he died a few days later

this “council” generally disclaimed and abhorred

Theodosius II died childless; his fine sister picked an elderly senator Marcian, married him; he thus became emperor of east; they called council for Nicea, but then changed site to Chalcedon

4. Council of Chalcedon, 451 AD

a. Nature of the council

called by Marcian; attended by 600 from the East plus three from Rome, who represented Leo and brought a letter from him

largest ecumenical council (smallest had been second council in Constantinople, with 150 from the East attending)

Leo opposed this council meeting where it did, wanted it to meet in Italy

b. Actions of the council

read and adopted Leo's letter to Flavian; (council declared, "Peter has spoken through Leo!"); *Leo's tome summarized Scriptural arguments for two natures of Christ; the final language of Chalcedon used negative words in the ruling to say how the two natures are not related:

- "unmixed and unchanged" = anti-Alexandrian
- "undivided and inseparable" = anti-Antiochian

condemned monophysitism and Eutyches

applied force: convert to orthodoxy, or be exiled and excommunicated

*28th canon: Old Rome = New Rome; i.e., bishop of Constantinople equal in rank and authority to the bishop of Rome (this opposed by Leo)

c. Later developments

many monophysites separated from church; now all Egyptian Coptic churches monophysite; but all western and most eastern churches remained in Catholic church

later, attempts were made to get monophysites back into church; compromises discussed (as monothelite idea); pressure from Persians and later from Mohammedans

Other events of the fifth century

1. End of the western empire

476, leader of an invading German tribe, Odoacer, removed weak child Romulus Augustus (son of a Pannonian general) from the throne, and sent tokens of the emperorship to Zeno, emperor of the East

he had Zeno proclaim him (Odoacer) *patricius* of troops in the West; thus Zeno had legal control of the whole empire, but actual control only of the East

from this time on, government of the West fragmented

2. Clovis and the Franks

(Clovis d. 511)

Franks settled in Gaul; pagans, not Arians
their ruler Clovis married the Christian daughter of a Burgundian (i.e., from southern Gaul); she converted him to orthodox Christianity after he won an important battle in 496

Clovis actively united much of Gaul, conquering small sections at a time; began fight with Arian leaders, personally killed many; used murder, intrigue, etc.; described as bloodthirsty and furious, yet praised to heavens by medieval chroniclers

established his capital in Paris; Gaul generally forced into orthodoxy

3. The pillar saints

special development in monasticism in the East

Simeon Stylites

ascetic monk, punished body; 423, started living on pillar of clay and dirt, forty miles east of Antioch; supplies given him by buckets and ladders; built several, each one higher, last one sixty feet high and three feet in diameter at top; had to stand or lean for 36 years

widely sought out and copied, even to the twelfth century; died when 69 years old

